

KAFF GERRARD (KATHERINE LEIGH-PEMBERTON)

The Retrospective Exhibition of Kaff Gerrard's work in 1991 unearthed and brought to light many exceptional paintings sending waves of interest throughout the art world. It was described by John Russell Taylor of the *The SundayTimes* as a rarity in that a very great artist from the first half of the 20th century had been discovered in the 90s. This was due to the fact that neither she nor A.H. Gerrard sought gallery limelight preferring to concentrate on achieving the quality of work clearly seen with both artists. Their historical place in the context of British modernist art has nevertheless made its mark.

AH Gerrard and Katherine Leigh-Pemberton met in 1920. They were both at the Slade as students. She was six years older and studying fine art under Professor Tonks and Wilson Steer and he was one year into his studies concentrating on drawing and engraving. Wilson Steer would describe her as "the most natural painter he had ever known at the Slade". Because of the strict male/female segregation of students at that time under the austere eye of the renowned Professor Tonks they did not actually meet at the Slade. Instead they met on the South downs of Sussex in a bull shed as they were both coincidentally working on their summer competition projects and had chosen to go to the same place. This meeting was the start of a close bond that lasted for 50 years. Engaged for nearly thirteen years whilst gradually obtaining the approval from Kaff's parents Gerrard and Kaff were married in 1932. They had worked closely together especially on the Millbank Stoneware which was exhibited at Colnaghi's and received much interest and international acclaim at that time.

Gerrard already had become head of the sculpture department at the Slade and worked in restricted rental accommodation. Seeking more space and tranquility they moved to Groombridge on the Kent/Sussex border and started a life together in the beautiful countryside where they were able to become fully absorbed in producing the enormous amount of quality works. Soon the artists Sir Tom Monnington and his wife Winnifred Knights were to join them as next door neighbours drawn by the artistic ambience of the surroundings. Tom described Kaff as having a “serene and charming nature.” She would spend her days painting in the Oast House out on the Sussex Downs. Together she and Gerrard made a great team and were ideally suited to each other. In all those years together Gerrard said that she never once raised her voice. Their works complimented each other and Gerrard would hand carve frames for her paintings which he greatly admired. “Her work once seen is never forgotten”, Russell Taylor wrote, “and never confused with that of anyone else. It combines technical mastery with personal vision in a way that only great art achieves.” The sculptor Brian Taylor an ex student of Gerrard’s would often visit. He described Kaff as a “visionary” and her wartime paintings of shot-down German aircraft as having a quality of Paul Nash about them. These were acquired by the Imperial War Museum in London.

Kaff died in 1970 and Sir Tom Monnington described Kaff as “a dedicated painter of considerable distinction”. Because they did not pursue the selling of their works this meant that the art collection of their works, apart from many commissions, early sales of the Millbank Stoneware and acquisitions by various galleries, has been kept together until this time. Kaff Gerrard left an incredible legacy of the many hundreds of exceptional paintings with their distinctive style and sensitive tonal qualities.